



January 30, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chairman
Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Casey
Ranking Member
Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Alexander and Collins and Ranking Members Murray and Casey:

On behalf of Meals on Wheels America, the nationwide network of community-based senior nutrition programs and the individuals they serve, we write to endorse the “Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020.” This legislation would amend H.R. 4334, the Dignity in Aging Act that passed by voice vote in the House last fall, and reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA) for five years. We commend you for your leadership and hard work to reach this bipartisan, bicameral agreement and urge unanimous passage as soon as possible.

Since 1965, the OAA has been the primary piece of federal legislation focused on establishing, coordinating and strengthening home- and community- based social and nutrition services for adults 60 and older and their families. OAA services like Meals on Wheels, transportation, caregiver assistance, senior employment and training and elder rights protection are just some of the vital functions the OAA provides to more than 11 million seniors annually.

As you and many of your colleagues know firsthand, OAA services and supports – including the three nutrition programs authorized under Title III of the Act – help keep our nation’s most vulnerable, isolated and food insecure seniors healthier and in their own homes and communities longer. This, in turn, delays and/or prevents altogether the need for more expensive institutional care often paid for through Medicare or Medicaid. OAA programs are not only extremely cost-effective, but they are also longstanding examples of public-private partnerships that save taxpayer dollars at the local, state and federal levels in terms of reduced healthcare expenditures.

We strongly support the authorized appropriations increases contained in this legislation. With nearly half of our Meals on Wheels programs having a documented waiting list for nutrition services, the 6% increase in authorization of funding levels through Fiscal Year 2024 for OAA programs will significantly improve the senior nutrition network’s ability to close these service gaps.

We further appreciate recognition of the significant impact of OAA nutrition services and supports and the steps taken to strengthen them through provisions in this final compromise reauthorization bill. Provisions that advance research and data, including capturing the unmet need and scope of waiting lists for congregate and home-delivered meals, and increase focus on culturally appropriate and medically-tailored meals, malnutrition, and the negative health consequences of social isolation are key priorities of our organization, among many others.

Accordingly, we urge the Senate to swiftly pass the “Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020” to help better meet the inherent changes in our country’s aging population and serve more of those in need. Meals on Wheels America and the nationwide network of senior nutrition programs have appreciated contributing feedback and policy recommendations throughout this reauthorization process and look forward to continuing to work with you to build upon the ongoing successes of the OAA.

Thank you again for your leadership, public service and support for our nation’s older adults.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Ellie Hollander". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ellie Hollander
President and CEO

cc: Chairman Michael Enzi and Ranking Member Bernie Sanders
Senate Subcommittee on Primary Health and Retirement Security

Chairman Bobby Scott and Ranking Member Virginia Foxx
House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairwoman Suzanne Bonamici and Ranking Member James Comer
House Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services